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Further information & references,

see A Tearing up of Time : 26th July 2016 (France) : Guy Briole, interviewed by Noa

Farchi at www.LacanianWorks.org /Authors A-Z (Briole or Index of Authors' texts)

or <https://web.archive.org/web/20220903135356/https://lacanianworks.net/2016/07/a-tearing-up-of-time-26th-july-2016-france-guy-briole/>

or www.LacanianWorksExchange.net /Other Authors A-Z (Briole)

A Tearing up of Time

by Guy Briole



In the aftermath of the latest terrorist attacks that took place in France -in Nice on July 14th and in a church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray 12 days later-, Noa Farchi interviewed Guy Briole.^[1] Guy Briole is a psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst. He is head of the medical school of military hospital le Val de Grâce in Paris..

Noa Farchi : All over the world, our lifestyles are being attacked by extremists and men are being “reduced to their masses” (I am quoting from your paper “Trauma” 1 published in 2012). How can we make sense of what is happening today?

Guy Briole : In the paper you are alluding to, I was in fact reflecting on the concentration camp with the help of Jacques Lacan’s teachings. In chapter 19 of *Seminar 2, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan was pointing out the tendency there is: “(...) to reason about men as if they were moons, calculating their masses, their gravitation”*. In *Mein Kampf* he added, “relations between men are spoken of as being like relations between moons”. In a seminar I gave in 2000 on the subject of Lacanian politics, I wrote the following and would not change a single word today: “Excluding one part of humanity from a possible relationship with others is treating it like a mass. All that remains to be done then is to define the criteria which constitute this mass, split them *en masse* and pursue the programme, inexorably. Nothing can stop it then. Such is the daunting perspective that prevails in the drift that indicates –despite claims to the contrary- a will to balance horror by evaluating the masses: weighing the number of survivors against those who have perished, highlighting other dark (and similar) moments in human history, getting everything to match up in numbers. (...) Thus, dealing with human beings as though they were masses – that which sustained the ideology that eventually led to the Holocaust-, not only pertains of the current trend of evaluation but also constitutes the first step towards negationism”. Terrorism, and Jihadism in particular, pose other questions today. They appear to be targeting, through symbols –the press, youth, religion-, everything that does not pertain to *their* Islamic and Salafist ideology; the mass, in this case, is made up of all the enemies of *their* faith. This is something that has to be measured against phenomena of group identification but also, and especially, against the specific issues of each and every man and woman who chooses to sacrifice his/her life to destroy other human beings, claiming to be acting for an Islamic State that is only to happy to take advantage of the situation. I believe psychoanalysis can, among other things, underline how hatred of the other is always present: whether we call it “express radicalisation” or “unpredictable enrolment”, hatred is always lurking and ready to take on all the most extreme forms of destruction of our fellow human beings.

N. F. : In your paper “Trauma”, you clearly oppose two concepts: “trauma” and “event”. An event can be erased whereas the traumatized patient experiences repetition. This is a distinction that one needs to bear in mind when one chooses to resort to psychoanalysis. As you put it yourself: “psychoanalysis can take place if the patient abandons the idea that the event constitutes a cause. It is the only ethical position”.

G. B. : Indeed, this distinction is of paramount importance and has to be maintained if you do not want to forfeit the issue of the patient’s responsibility

as a subject of his/her history. Trauma poses an ethical question: how can one speak adequately of a traumatic event when, precisely, the patient feels that no words can capture the depth of the experience that changed his life forever? The patient has to deal with an emergence of the Real but has no adequate words to do so at his/her disposal. It is tempting, in such cases, to use what we have at hand and resort to causality. But in fact the seemingly “obvious” cause blinds the patient, saturates images and thought alike. It is all the more silencing as everyone is speaking in the stead of the one who can express nothing more than his/her intolerable suffering that has left him facing the gaping hole of traumatic experience. The current trend is to resort to EMDR (*Eye Movement Desensitization Retraining*), to cortisol or catharsis. The victim of trauma must comply with everything that has been planned out for him/her. If he/she agrees, he/she officially becomes a victim, is cared for, gets compensation, receives an award... But he/she is also muzzled for the paradox is that he/she is forced to speak to effectively be silenced! Psychoanalysis is at odds with all these techniques insofar as it claims that if an event can be collective, trauma is always an individual experience. It is essential to bring these patients both to free themselves of the collective discourse and to support themselves with their own words. We can only stress how crucial it is, from one traumatized patient to the next, to enable them to restore the traumatic event within their own history while considering that the chance traumatic experience also partly holds him/her responsible. I believe this constitutes one of the ethical guidelines that could help those who counsel such patients, and I speak not just for psychoanalysts: do not force your patients to speak but, rather, thanks to the subtle link of transference, lead them away from the fixed event toward the singularity of their experience, thus enabling a possible *hystorisation*.

N. F. : Referring to your text once more, you quote Rachel Ertel, “extermination is not death, it is a tearing of time”. This leads me back to what Freud said about time, that Time does not exist in the unconscious. But evoking a “tearing of time” is another matter...

G. B. : This sentence comes in at the end of a chapter which I would like to quote in full: “The paths of death encircle the earth in all directions, and every remnant of Jewish life has been wiped out. It is a chaotic world devoid of signs, landmarks. The temporal order, contrary to ever-changing and flexible space, is enduring in its three dimensions of present projected into the past and the future. Time, with its inexorable flow whose natural boundary is death, represents the deepest and most intimate part of human experience.

Extermination, annihilation is not death. It is a tearing of time” 2. This “tearing of time” is what survivors testify to. They no longer believe in history. Their feeling of belonging to history has been affected. Even when they are among their family. They are not guilty of having survived (as the Americans –and others- have been cynically claiming it since the end of the war) but rather are living among the dead, those that cannot be spoken. Extermination has attacked language itself, has “ripped out” language, dismantled the most intimate structures and disturbed the temporal order, the order whose natural boundary is death. As Rachel Ertel puts it herself, when it comes to the survivors of the Holocaust, it is not a question of death insofar as it is a part of life, as it triggers the imaginary and leads to feelings of guilt. It suffices to listen to them and learn to hear what little language they have left. What they

speak of is the tearing up of history in which they came face to face with a merciless other and in which they experienced shame.^[1] A former deportee explained that, for a great number of years, she was haunted by a question: “why me?” This was an ambiguous question as it could mean both “why was I deported?” and “why did I survive?”. Her moving on to “why couldn’t it be me!” was only made possible once she had distanced herself from the guilt that had been imposed on her by others.

1 Briole G., «Trauma », Scilicet, Paris, Collection rue Huysmans, 2012, p. 393. Online version : <http://www.etemere.fr>

2 Our translation of the extract quoted by Guy Briole of Rachel ERTEL, *Dans la langue de personne*, Paris, Seuil, April 1993, p. 75.

References

* Seminar II : 25th May 1955 : P235 of Sylvania Tomaselli’s translation :

Last time, I left you with a somewhat strange question, but one which came directly out of what I was saying to you – why don’t the planets speak?

We aren't at all like planets, that's something we can have a sense of whenever we want, but that doesn't prevent us from forgetting it. We always have a tendency to reason about men as if they were moons, calculating their masses, their gravitation. That isn't an illusion peculiar to us, us scientists [*savants*] - it is quite especially tempting for politicians.

I am thinking of a work which has been forgotten, though it wasn't that unreadable, because it probably wasn't written by the author who signed it- it had the title *Mein Kampf*. Well, in this work by the said Hitler, which has lost a great deal of its topicality, relations between men are spoken of as being like relations between moons. And there's always the temptation to construct a psychology and a psychoanalysis of moons, whereas all you need do to see the difference is refer directly to experience.

For instance, I am rarely altogether happy. Last time, I wasn't at all happy, no doubt because I tried to fly too high - I wouldn't have engaged in all that flapping of wings if everything had been well prepared. However, several kind people, those who accompany me to the door, told me that everybody was happy. Rather an exaggeration of the position, I imagine. No matter, that's what I was told. Moreover, at the time I wasn't convinced. But why not! So I said to myself- if the others are happy, that's the main thing. That's where I am different from a planet.

Availability given Session of Seminar II Introduction of the Big Other : 25th May 1955 : Jacques Lacan, see www.LacanianWorks.org /4 Jacques Lacan (19550525 or Index of Jacques Lacan’s texts.